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*Authority in the modern state.* By Harold J. Laski, sometime exhibitor of New college, Oxford. (New Haven: Yale university press, 1919. 398 p. \$3.00)

In this notable contribution to the modern philosophy of the state, Mr. Laski carries on, with his usual erudition and with considerable success, the fascinating search for the explanation of political phenomena begun in his *Studies in the problem of sovereignty*. He propounds for inquiry two far-reaching questions: (1) Why does the individual yield political obedience? (2) How should authority be organized so as best to effect the purpose of the state? Rejecting the contract theory, he still admits that consent is an important element in obedience. That is, governmental acts must meet with the approval of the individual conscience. It follows that the individual has certain rights (among them freedom of thought) which must be secure against state invasion, and that the "last word" to the individual is the voice of duty. This leads to a pluralistic view of the state and a pragmatic attitude toward state acts. There results a decentralized federalism of responsible, autonomous groups, which do not depend upon law but have an inherent right to their existence, and in which the bond of association is the performance of a common function. This is true democracy. Only *right* is sovereign.

In four detailed studies, the writer shows how French political philosophy and practice in the nineteenth century support the conclusions he has set forth. The theocratic traditionalism of Bonald, based on unity and authority, convicted itself by its inadequacy. Lamennais, by dint of hard thinking, substituted for an intolerant philosophy of unity and order a tolerant liberalism based on division of power, liberty of conscience, and a democratic conception of the state. Royer-Collard opposed to political traditionalism his theory of the decentralized, multi-cellular state, in which personality is free to develop. Finally there has been in the French civil service the development of a group consciousness and a desire for functional decentralization, with group autonomy and responsibility.

Mr. Laski has promised a book on the theory of the state that will be eagerly awaited. Doubtless no one knows better than he that he has left many important questions unanswered. One may hope, too, that further wrestling with the formulation of the political principles underlying the modern state will result in a greater lucidity. I think it was a contemporary of Lamennais, who said, "On ne peut se flatter d'avoir le dernier mot d'une théorie tant qu'on ne peut pas l'expliquer en peu de paroles à un passant dans la rue." It is to be regretted, also, that the present book is marred by numerous typographical errors.

A. R. E.